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QUYEN MAI LE AND GIRMA KELBORO

**WHEN HERITAGE GOES WAYS APART:
Heritagization and local involvement at the Complex of
Monuments in Hue, Vietnam**

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**DI SẢN VĂN HÓA VỚI HỘI NHẬP VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN
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CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT, HUE - ONE DESTINATION, FIVE WORLD HERITAGES
PATRIMOINE CULTUREL, INTÉGRATION ET DÉVELOPPEMENT, HUẾ - UNE DESTINATION POUR CINQ PATRIMOINES MONDIAUX



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Authors' addresses

Quyen Mai Le

Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn,
Genscherallee 3

53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel. 0049 (0)172-3640832; Fax 0228-731972

E-mail: guyen.mai@uni-bonn.de

Dr. Girma Kelboro

Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn,
Genscherallee 3

53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel. 0049 (0)228-73 4969; Fax 0228-731972

E-mail: gmensuro@uni-bonn.de

www.zef.de

WHEN HERITAGE GOES WAYS APART:

Heritagization and local involvement at the Complex of Monuments in Hue, Vietnam

Quyên Mai Lê and Girma Kelboro

Abstract

This paper is based on the results of qualitative research conducted in Thua Thien-Hue province, Vietnam, between 2017 and 2018. It takes the case of the Complex of Monuments in Hue (hereafter called as The Hue Complex), a heritage site that belonged to the last Feudal Dynasty in Vietnam before 1945. Between the 1970s and 1980s, the Hue Complex and its cultural values was ignored and negatively judged by the contemporary Vietnamese post-socialism regime. Nevertheless, everything changed when the Hue Complex got enlisted by UNESCO as cultural World Heritage site in 1993, and since then it has claimed to be an invaluable cultural property of the nation. This paper aims to understand the heritagization of the Hue Complex and impacts of this process to the local people using the data collected through discourse analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Firstly, it follows the discourses that have been provided in order to transform the Hue Complex from contentious cultural elements of the past into outstanding universal values of the present. The findings show that the heritagization of the Hue Complex involved aesthetic judgments, international and national experts' discourses, and the Vietnamese national grand narratives. Secondly, focusing on the perceptions and experiences of three groups of communities who live in and around the designated sites, we found out that regardless of the attempts of local and national government bodies to synchronize the cultural values of the Hue Complex with global schemes and to promote tourism, the heritage itself is detaching from the local people. They, on the contrary, seem to develop another version of heritage – a spiritual one. These findings suggest nuanced ways of perceiving heritage. They have elucidated the separate processes of heritage making, of which the heritage manufactured and valorized by the dominant actors is different from the heritage as perceived by the local people. Consequently, the enlisted heritage – manifested belong to and benefit for the local community – is eventually losing its meaning and connections with its own people.

Key words: heritagization, UNESCO, cultural heritage, World Heritage, Hue, Vietnam

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1 Introduction

The 21st century has marked vigorous emergence of various transnational phenomena which spill out of the coping capacities of any state alone, and simultaneously, legitimate the roles of various non-governmental as well as bilateral, multilateral and global actors. Human societies across the globe redefined environmental, socio-cultural and political values to have meaning beyond their specific localities or national boundaries. This is visible, for example, in cultural heritage (Harrison, 2015), environmental governance (McIntyre, 2018) and conservation in protected areas (Kelboro and Stellmacher, 2012). In 1972, the UNESCO “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” (also widely known as the World Heritage Convention (WHC)) came into being. Ever since, World Heritage was officially marked into the list of transnational phenomena. World Heritage is defined by UNESCO as an “outstanding universal value” and “irreplaceable source of life and inspiration” that is built from the past but used contemporarily (www.unesco.org).

In fact, after more than forty years of popularization, WHC is now known as “one of the most successful and influential international treaties” (Albert and Ringbeck, 2015; Frey and Steiner, 2011). It has been ratified by 193 countries and listed 1092 sites around the world by 2018. Heritage is now intertwined in all facets of contemporary societies (Bendix, 2009; Harrison, 2013). Regardless of this ubiquities, not everything that belongs to the past can be granted the status of a World Heritage site (WHS). Being recognized as “outstanding values of heritage” requires a process of identification, valuation, categorization, and then listing for conservation and development. Heritage thus has never been an innate thing, but it is produced and reproduced through a process of heritage making. Since the beginning of the ‘heritage boom’ in the late twentieth century, scholarly discussions showed more close interests into this process, which is later termed as ‘*heritagization*’ (Bendix, 2009; Harrison, 2013; Walsh, 1992). And as a process, it refers to actors, agency, power, and discourse within certain settings of a society. Heritagization is a vigorously selective, dynamic and political process. It is not about the past, but the contemporary time.

Over the last decade, the conceptualization of heritage as a process has urged the need to re-investigate the relationship between actors of different levels, as well as between actors and heritage properties that are being integrated in wider societal settings. Currently, although it is agreed amongst most scholars that heritagization is majorly controlled by the elites passing the globalized narratives down to the national and local reality (Bendix, 2009; Giovine, 2009; Harrison, 2013; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006), evidences on how the process happens and how is it experienced by the people on the ground given this dominance are still conflicting between positive and negative in different studies (Graham et al., 2007, 2000; Silva, 2014; Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009; Winter, 2008). Envisaged such complexity of the topic, Breidenbach and Nyíri (2007) have earlier suggested that heritagization needs to be read in the contexts of distinctive places in order to understand its dynamics and consequences.

Therefore, the paper takes the case of Hue Complex of Monuments as the case study to understand the process that transformed cultural properties into significant World heritage sites, and its results on the ground in Vietnam. The Hue Complex of Monuments belongs to the last Feudal Dynasty of Vietnam before 1945. Previously, the cultural aspects of the Hue Complex was trapped in different contested political

perceptions. However, in 1993, the Complex was listed as a WHS by the UNESCO marking a series of changes in the assessment of its values. Since then, the Complex has played vital roles in the contemporary Vietnamese identity and society. Nationally, the Complex is considered as the bridge between Vietnam and UNESCO, as well as the leading resource for national unification and nation-building. Locally, the Hue Complex has been seen as a source of pride, a representative symbol for the Hue people's identity. Different cultural assets and practices have been restored and revitalized that have enriched the life of people on one hand, and promoted for tourism development on the other hand (Vu and Ton-That, 2012). As the Hue Complex has now become a famous tourist attraction, it is widely assumed to be significance for the economy and culture of the Hue people in generally (Hue Monument Conservation Centre, 2018; Johnson, 2010; Ngo, 2018)

Adopting the concept of heritagization, the paper will firstly elucidate the underlying justifications, authorized discourses and intentions which have been made in the process by the actors from global and national levels. Furthermore, it will extend the key focus to the impacts that the WHS label has on different groups of local people including those who live within and next to designated sites, and the descendants of the feudal family. It also tries to unveil their perceptions towards the Hue Complex WHS. Two main questions will be addressed in the paper: (1) How has the Hue Complex of Monuments been transformed from a contentious past into a significant WHS at the present? (2) How is this transformative process perceived by the people living at the designated sites?

2 The concept and global process of heritagization

In recent years, heritage has seemingly grown to become a ubiquitous concept that is favorably embraced by many actors across different spheres: national, international and local politics or sectors, such as tourism and urban planning. Heritage has always been there as a part of the human society, however, the concept has become omnipresent after the World War II and broke out to be a global phenomenon ever since the 1970s (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006). Although associated with preserving the past, heritage is actually believed to shape the present and future ideas and practices. To serve this function, heritage is actively made with purposes. This section aims to elaborate on the conceptualization and processes of heritagization.

2.1 Heritagization as a concept

Robert Hewison, in *"The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline"* (1987), was among the first who made remarkable concerns on heritagization – a process in which certain favorable items were intentionally selected, produced and made significant by the British heritage industries during the 20th century. Hewison starts his argument in the context of a politically, economically and socially distressed United Kingdom after World War II. British citizens developed nostalgic urges to look for favorable pasts in order to cope with this "climate of decline" in the post-war recession period. Museums collected certain memories and traditions of cultural significance to display that could filter out the "unpleasant aspects" of memories and history. According to Hewison, a heritage industry hence began, museums emerged, and heritages were consequently being superficially and nostalgically "manufactured". Focusing on the

emergence of museums and museum visiting activities, Hewison strongly criticizes the heritagization process where historical truth and accuracy were being questioned and traditional practices of history were sacrificed for economic values. He stated: *"Instead of manufacturing goods, we are manufacturing heritage, a commodity which nobody seems able to define, but which everybody is eager to sell..."* (Hewison, 1987, p.9).

Following the above critiques against museology in the British context, Kevin Walsh (1992) shares the argument of Hewison that people were getting more and more distant from their daily lives which made them lose their sense of places, leading to an emergence of heritage and a heritage industry. However, Walsh adds that this emergence of heritage "should not just be considered as a characteristic of a 'climate of decline' (Hewison, 1987), but that it should also be seen as part of a wider service-class culture which expanded during the 1980s'." (Walsh, 1992, p.4). The beginning of the 1990s, according to Walsh, were highlighted by the experiences of a (post)modern society with technological advances that put many people into a crisis of meaning toward their own places. This process may explain the increased attractiveness of heritage and museums as devices for sense and place-making. Many museums with their identity and place making ideology were constructed by the ruling class who try to possess control over the past. These ruling classes tend to only select safe images of certain places, put them into the process of "imagineering" to fit them in certain acceptable "national" themes, such as unity, royalty, country houses, benevolent industry, and the rural idyll (Walsh, 1992). Although these processes were justified as provision of public services, building of identities, Walsh criticized that these were rarely meant for public goods but just to cover the economic concerns. From here, Walsh coined the term "heritagization of place" which implies the reduction of real places to tourist spaces, constructed by the selective quotation of images of many different pasts which more often than not contribute to the destruction of actual places (Walsh, 1992). The process of heritagization in Walsh's analysis is the process through which the ruling class colonized the past for their benefits through the aegis of heritage industry (Preucel, 1993). Concerning the consequences of heritagization, while Hewison questions the historical truth and accuracy of the heritagization process, Walsh expresses his concern over "the local people" who were disenfranchised when it came to the construction of the places that they are living in.

From the works of both Hewison and Walsh, it needs to be asserted that heritagization is an ingredient of modern society which is tied to certain political and economic values of certain actors of interests (Bendix, 2009). Experiencing the boom of cultural heritage which was shifting from tangible to intangible aspects at the end of the 1990s, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) examines the process of heritagization in the making of cultural WHSs, which in her own terms are "metacultural operations". These operations had extended "museological values and methods (collection, documentation, preservation, presentation, evaluations, and interpretation) to living person, their knowledge, practices, artifacts, social worlds, and life spaces" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006, p.1). This is where the World Heritage programme turns problematic in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's analysis. Firstly, it is problematic because intangible heritages are living persons who are both the object and subject of culture. In the process of heritagization of cultural properties, particularly the case of the intangibles, these living objects are treated as freezing for preservation and safeguarding measurements while neglecting their agency. Moreover, the heritage programme also tends to neglect the persons' rights to what they do and what

they possess. This can be seen in the way that heritage practices are codified and developed into the universal standards which obscure the historical and cultural uniqueness that belongs to a particular group or community. And lastly, she discusses that the living subjects – the truthful cultural carriers, transmitters and agents – are often excluded when it comes to the processes of heritage evaluation, value, and valorization as these rights are often attached to the outsider experts.

Drawing on the above argumentations, Robert Harrison (2013) summarizes the development of heritage practices into three phases: The first phase is signified by the process of producing a public sphere under the waves of the enlightenment during the 19th century. The second is intertwined with nation-building strategies in which the state increasingly took control over the definition, selection, management, and exhibition of heritage. This finally resulted in the establishment of the World Heritage Convention in 1972. Since then, heritage has gradually become a global phenomenon. Focusing on the third phase, Harrison analyzes the heritagization process in the context of late modernity. Heritagization, according to Harrison, is also the physical response to the “problem of the material excess of ruin” (Harrison, 2013, p.80). Explaining the process in parallel with the notion of uncertainty, risk and fluidity of the late modern society, Harrison envisages heritagization as the process concerned with the management process of waste. As objects, places and practices rapidly became derelict, in order to give the redundancy a “second life” we turn it into heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). Heritagization is intrinsically a transformative process that gives objects and practices a new function attached with cultural values. However, the process is always highly selective thus not all can be made heritage (Bendix, 2009; Harrison, 2013). Harrison differentiates this as official and unofficial heritages. An official heritage is recognized and authorized globally and nationally by some forms of legislation or written charters. It is often seen to be conserved and promoted for their aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or recreational values. The unofficial heritage refers to the broader range of practices that might be important for certain groups in a society, however, they are not formally recognized by any legislations (Harrison, 2013).

Both Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Harrison strongly emphasize the interactions between people – the living objects – and their heritage concerning spaces, places, landscapes, objects or practices which are often overlooked (Harrison, 2013; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006; Smith, 2006). As global professionalization of heritage homogenously lists, categorizes, preserves and develops official heritage, it tends to induce conflicts with unofficial local, often indigenous heritage practices. Therefore, Harrison (2013) suggests that heritage should be studied within “chains of connectivity” between people, objects, places and practices, as something revolving and adaptable in the flux of late modern society. This would help to establish new ways of understanding heritage and to grant more agency for unofficial – heritage practices of “local people”.

In short, heritagization is a process that transforms certain objects, places, or practices into heritage. The process is not self-generated but it is produced and driven by actors in larger political, cultural, social and economic processes. This study bases its analysis on the two parallel aspects of heritagization which are the authorized discourses that canonized heritage properties, and the imagineering that contextualizes them in the wider settings of society. Eventually, these processes equip the designated properties with new significant functions in the contemporary world. There are three main points that will be put on focus in this paper. First, heritagization will have to be studied in the contemporary context of late-modernity,

concerning the dynamics in relations to its elements (such as the time and space compression, the risk society, the advances of information technology, and the changes of tourists' behaviors and trends). Secondly, heritagization is tied with power to decide what should be officially recognized as a heritage and what should not. And thirdly, heritagization entails the potential tensions between global universality and local uniqueness, between officially and not officially recognized, and between culture bearers and the outsiders.

2.2 Heritagization as a global process

World Heritage is the product of modern society. As Smith confirms, there is no such a thing as heritage, it is made and spread through a dominant discourse that authorizes certain values and meanings to heritage (Smith, 2006). The concept and scope of heritage practices have always been adjusted and evolving along with the transformations of political, economic and social systems. Heritage has long been suggested to be studied as a process rather than an object. For instance, in 1985, David Lowenthal emphasizes heritage is a “way” of engaging things with a sense of history. In 2001, David Charles Harvey suggested that heritage should be considered as a verb which deals with actions, agency and power of identities (Harvey, 2001). Laurajane Smith (2006) insists that it has not been about the sites, buildings, places or any other material objects. These material objects act as the cultural tools which are attached with meanings and values so that they can easily facilitate the heritage process. The process of heritage making therefore entails the constructions and negotiations of meanings through remembering (Smith, 2006). Harrison advances in confirming heritage making as an active process in which objects, places and practices are being subjectedly and purposely assembled so that a certain set of values will be preserved to reflect the present, and taken with us into the future (Harrison, 2013).

By the beginning of the 21st century, heritagization gradually became a global process which created a heritage boom throughout the world (Harrison, 2013; Walsh, 1992). The Convention has become one of the most successful international treaties with the most ratifications of nation states. The WH list has expanded from 12 inscriptions in 1987 to 1092 in 2018 and this number is unlikely to stop increasing (UNESCO, 2018). More than 86.5% of the state parties possess at least one or more WHSs in the list, especially nominations and listings from developing countries are growing. To be a WHS has become the most convenient tool to lift a heritage in a specific localized context up to the global sphere of universal common heritage – justified as heritage of humanity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). Being in the list promises global recognition, admiration, protection as well as other social and economic potentials. The recent years have witnessed the enthusiasm of many states in nominating more and more WHSs. Nowadays, WH inscriptions are getting more diverse ranging from tangible objects and buildings to cultural practices, intangible pieces of cultural performance, or recently to the memorial and documenting properties. This reversely forced the UNESCO World Heritage committee to revise their scopes, framework as well as their methods several times. Over the course of more than 40 years, the UNESCO heritage definition and designation process have been extremely dynamic. There have been enormous expansions not only in the heritage definitions, but also in the heritage listing, categorizing and monitoring (Albert and Ringbeck, 2015).

Also during this time, UNESCO and its advisory bodies have invested much efforts to standardize the process of nomination, listing, protecting and developing WHSs. In order to recognize a site, precise criteria and conditions for inscription have been developed to evaluate the 'outstanding universal value' by different experts. And once a site gets listed, in order to facilitate states parties in the protection and management of WHSs, UNESCO provided the 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention'. This document is revised annually to reflect new concepts, knowledge or experiences. The operational guidelines are often treated as measurements and referenced documents to be adjusted and combined with national sets of legislation to protect and develop the site according to their tentative plan and interests. Scholars have criticized this process as a product of globalization that tries to homogenize cultural processes by transforming a local "uniqueness" into a "universal" (Bendix, 2009; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). In "World Heritage and cultural economics", Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) points this out as a paradox in the global "World Heritage" program. On one hand, heritage is local and unique, while on the other hand, it is universal – in the sense that it belongs to the whole humanity, and managed by nation states (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006).

Moreover, heritagization also gives the chosen properties a new commercial function. The title of a WHS can be the brand-mark for tourism promotion. There is a clear trend that people are increasingly interested in and come to visit WHSs. Statistics on the number of visitors to WHSs since the 1970s show a steep upwards trend in visitors. The financial contributions of heritage tourism have also seen to account to economic development in some places (Albert and Ringbeck, 2015; Hitchcock et al., 2010). "Heritage was no longer simply a symbol of civic society and a part of the educative apparatus of the nation-state, but became an important "industry" in its own right" (Harrison, 2013, p.87). However, if heritage is commodified and marketed for tourism, tourists are also very active in choosing what they want to experience. To make a WHS profitable, the heritage industry needs to constantly diversify and regenerate it to make it desirable and visitable for a wide range of people with different backgrounds and expectations. Therefore, heritagization is not about the fixation of the past, but it is an on-going dynamic progress that makes and re-makes the past to fit into the present values and ideas.

We argue that heritagization needs to be studied as one ingredient of the late modern society. It is an integral part of political, cultural, social and economic processes that are transformed under the effect of globalization. Heritagization is a global process that selectively shapes the present ideas and values through utilizing the past as a resource (Harrison, 2013; Harvey, 2001). Envisaging this as a global process in such characteristics will raise several questions for this study. First of all, as a process, how is certain localized uniqueness made into universal value? Secondly, as a selective process, who would and could be able to be involved? How do actors conduct in such a process? And thirdly, if this is global, then what would happen when it comes to the local level realities? These draw the valid reasons for this study to intensively look at the case of the WHS in Hue, Vietnam.

3 Methodology

3.1 Study site

Hue city is located in Thua Thien – Hue province in central Vietnam (Figure 1). Hue is known as the last feudal capital of Vietnam between 1802 and 1945, before the Indochina wars. It is considered to be the historical, cultural, political and religious center of the country. Nowadays, many of the feudal monuments have been reconstructed and well preserved in and around the city.

Figure 1. Study site



(Photo: sizedus.com)

In 1993, UNESCO enlisted the Complex of Hue Monuments as a WHS under the criterion (iv) that states: “The Complex of Hue monuments is an outstanding example of an eastern feudal capital” (UNESCO, 2018). The Hue Complex entails 14 components and is divided into three categories by the national government (Bui, 2016):

- 1) The Royal complex of Citadels and palaces: This complex covers an area of 520 hectares. It was constructed in three layers of the Citadel including: the Royal City (Kinh Thành), the Imperial Citadel (Hoàng Thành) and the Forbidden Purple City (Tử Cấm Thành). The Complex was separated from the outside by an 11km long concrete Citadel Wall (Thượng Thành).
- 2) Royal tombs and mausoleum: These are the seven tombs of seven Nguyen kings in different generations. Tombs vary in structure, style, and scale. However, all feature the oriental philosophy which believed in the interrelationship between human and nature.
- 3) Architectural works of religions, beliefs and rituals: there are seven temples, pagodas, and 14 architectural works associated with the spiritual beliefs of the Nguyen Dynasty under the influence of Buddhism.

Different from other WHS, the Hue Complex does not localize in one bounded area but rather spreads in an area of more than 1000 square kilometers (Giovine, 2009). Eight components situated at different places of Hue city of which the Citadel lies in the center; four are in Huong Tra district, and three scatter in neighboring administrative districts.

According to the National Cultural Heritage Law in 2001, the protected area at each heritage component is divided into Zone I and II. Zone I covers the core structures of the heritage which is strictly protected without any modifications and interventions. Zone II surrounds the outer of Zone I, on which, supplementary constructions are allowed under the authorization of the national and local government. In the case of the Hue Complex, all buildings and houses in Zone II are limited under 11 meters high. Any plans for reconstruction need to apply for permission of the Provincial People's Committee.

Figure 2. Components of the Hue Complex



(Photo from left to right: 1) Main gate to the Imperial Citadel 2) The Citadel Wall 3) Khai Dinh Tombs 4) Thien Mu Pagoda (source: Hue Monument Conservation Center, 2018)

3.2 Data collection methods

Prior to the empirical research, secondary data was collected and reviewed in Germany and Vietnam. The actual field research took place in Vietnam between June 2017 and May 2018. Guided by case study research design (De Vaus, 2001; Yin, 2014, 2003), the paper applied a diverse set of qualitative research methods in order to capture the width and depth of the research topic.

At the first stage, the researchers made visits to tour operators both in Germany and Vietnam in order to understand the images of Hue and the WHS Hue Complex. In the field in Hue, we participated in tourist tours at designated sites in order to observe how different actors appreciate and/or utilize the WHS. At the end of this stage, the overview of the Complex concerning its attached meanings, values, and images was fully captured. Moreover, different actors and gatekeepers were also identified in this period.

At stage two, identified gatekeepers and actors were approached for further in-depth interviews. Overall, we interviewed with nine officers from provincial and communal governmental bodies, 13 informants working in tourism sectors, and one expert in Nguyen Dynasty heritage study. Moreover, we also approached two groups of local people: those live who in Zone I and II of the heritage components, and the Nguyen descendants. The detailed profiles of informants can be referenced below (Table 1).

Table 1. Profiles of interviewed informants

Actors	Number of informants
Provincial/communal officers	8
Officer from HMCC	1
Local tourism businesses	10
Tourism workers (guides and photographers)	3
Experts in Nguyen Dynasty heritage study	1
Small local businesses	2
Local people	38
Visitors	4
Total	67

Furthermore, two focus group discussions (FDGs) were conducted. The first FGD was conducted with people who mostly have been living in Tran Huy Lieu Street for more or less 30 years. This street lies right next to the outer Wall of the Citadel, the most important component of the Hue Complex. The second FGD was with descendants of the Nguyen Dynasty who are voted to act as the representatives for the royal kinship. Information collected in this stage provide in-depth understanding of actors' perceptions, experiences toward the heritage-making process; as well as, their relationships in this field.

4 The heritagization of cultural heritage in Hue

4.1 The background of World cultural heritage values in Hue

The Hue Complex of monuments, the heritage of the last Vietnamese Feudal Dynasty, was designated by UNESCO in 1993 as the first WHS in Vietnam. The World Heritage Committee describes the values of the Hue Complex as an "outstanding example of an eastern feudal capital" (Hue Monument Conservation Center, 2018). This designation was considered one of the first cultural bridges that introduced Vietnam to the world after the end of the war in 1975. Hue WHS furthermore led to a more active role of the Vietnamese government in successfully nominating 24 other WHSs¹ until 2018 (Ministry of Culture, Sport,

¹ In 2018, Vietnam has 24 World Heritage inscriptions in categories of natural, cultural, intangible cultural, and documentary. This list does not include the UNESCO world geoparks and biosphere reserves.

and Tourism, 2018). It is worthwhile to look into the historical background of the Hue Complex with a focus on the process of appraising the heritage values in feudal monuments.

Hue city is found in a strategic geographical location which witnessed multi layers of historical upheavals. Since the 1550s, the first Nguyen Lords had chosen Hue to build up their metropolis (Le et al., 2004). In 1802, the Nguyen defeated their political rival – the Tay Son – and claimed their reigning power all over Vietnam. Between 1802 and 1945, Hue city had then become the official capital of the last feudal regime of Vietnam prior to the Indochina wars. Over 400 years of feudalism, the Nguyen Dynasty had embedded their lives, ideology and power within the construction of more than 1.400 monumental and architectural properties (Hue Monument Conservation Centre, 2018; Tran and Phan, 2002). In 1945, the last king resigned in Hue to hand over the country to the French. Since then, the city went through two wars against the French and Americans which resulted in severe destructions of most feudal monuments. After the wars in 1975, the Hue Complex continued to endure many “political prejudices” (*định kiến chính trị*) shaped by the Communist Party of Vietnam. The feudal monuments were framed as the “feudal rebel” (*Phong kiến phản động*) which left the Complex with further decay in most buildings during the time of national unification between the 1970s and 1980s (Salemink, 2012).

The fate of the Hue Complex changed in 1981 after a visit of Mr. M’Bow, then UNESCO Director who recognized and emphasized the aesthetic, historic and cultural values of the monuments. Following the appeal of Mr. M’Bow, international and national attention and funding have been pouring in for the restoration and conservation of the buildings. Until 2016, the city had received more than 1,186 billion Vietnamese Dong (VND) (approximately 52 million USD) from the national government, UNESCO and other international bodies for restoration, reconstruction and conservation works of the Hue Complex. More than 140 buildings have been reconstructed. Utilizing such a glamorous effect of its first World Heritage recognition, Hue has expanded its fame in the World Heritage list with four more inscriptions namely: World intangible heritage of Royal court music, World documentary heritage of Woodblocks of Nguyen Dynasty, Imperial Archives of Nguyen Dynasty, and Royal literature on the Royal architecture (Table 2).

Table 2. List of World Heritage inscriptions in Hue

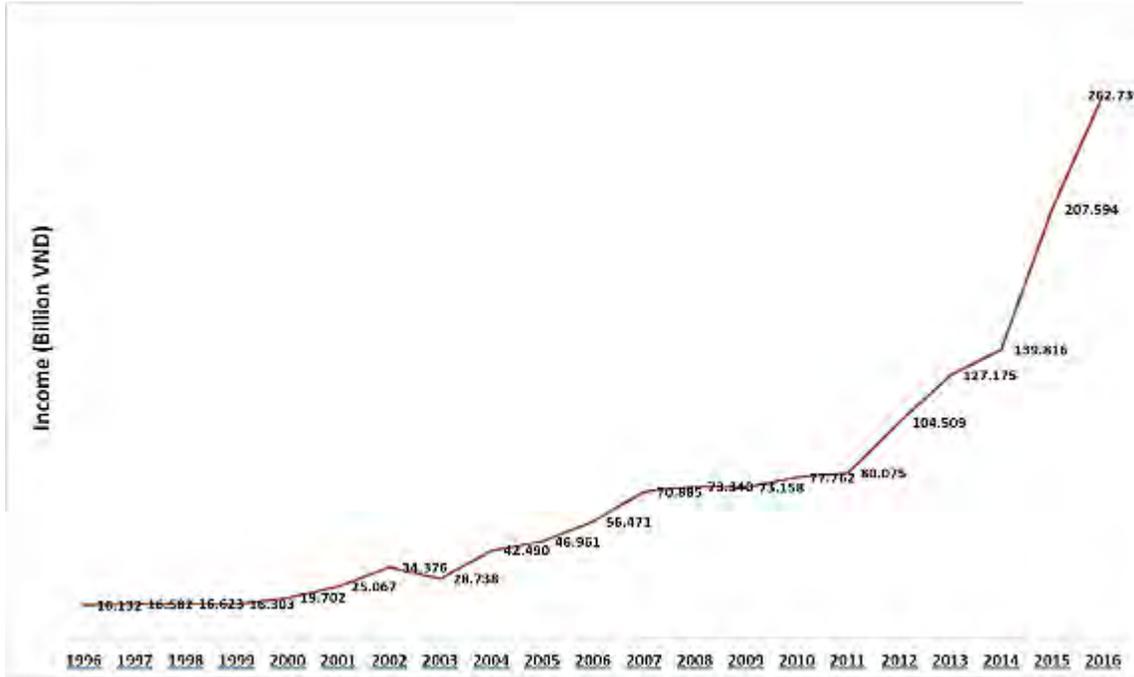
Inscription	Category	Year of inscription
Complex of Monuments	Cultural heritage	1993
Royal court music	Intangible cultural heritage	2003
Woodblocks of Nguyen Dynasty	Documentary heritage	2009
Imperial Archives of Nguyen Dynasty	Documentary heritage	2014
Royal literature on Royal architecture	Documentary heritage	2016

(Source: Hue Monument Conservation Centre, 2018)

Today, Hue is one of the most visited tourist destinations in Vietnam. The WHS status has helped the city to attract greater interest nationally and internationally. After more than 20 years of inscription, the total number of visitors to the Hue Complex has increased by ten-fold, from 243,000 in 1993 to more than 2.4 million tourists in 2016. Hence, revenues generated from selling tickets have elevated steadily over the

years (Figure 3). Especially, the income of the last 5 years rocketed when it tripled from nearly 80.1 billion in 2012 to more than 262.7 billion VND in 2016. It is estimated that until 2026, the total income from entrance fees at the WHS would reach about 3,800 billion VND (Hue Monument Conservation Centre, 2018).

Figure 3. Income from selling tickets to visitors from 1996 to 2016



(Source: Hue Monument Conservation Centre, 2018)

With the WHS status, Hue has turned its fate from “rebellious” and “prejudiced” into the “prestige” and “favorable”. The World Heritage values have confirmed its position and new functions in the social live in general, and in the heart of the Hue people in particular (Dang, 2018, 2007).

In the next part of the paper, we will dive into the process of heritagization in the case of Hue. It will look at the discourse that has been used to reclaim the history and culture of Hue into the prestige list of World Cultural Heritage. And in turn, we will discuss how the WHS status has been utilized by national and local governments in order to fit into the state socio-economic development plans, and the grand narratives of the nation-building in Vietnam.

4.2 Turning the table: The authorized heritage discourse in the case of Hue

This section will depict the process that turned what was once pictured as the unfavorable feudal rebel to the “iconic” World Cultural Heritage value of Hue giving it a whole new function and position in the city and the country.

In 1945, after 200 years of ruling, Bao Dai – the last Nguyen King – resigned and gave the country to the French colonization. This historical moment was considered as a national shame, leading to the accusation of the Nguyen Dynasty as the national traitors who “lost the country”, and then sold it to foreigners. After 1945, the Nguyen Dynasty has long been depicted as feudal, reactionary despots (Lockhart, 2001). After the Indochina wars in 1975, the North and South of Vietnam was reunited as one nation and governed by socialist regime under the leadership of the Communist Party. Due to the previous history with feudalism and colonialism, the Hue Complex did not fit into the new socialist settings, hence continued to be negatively assessed by the national government. The Hue Complex as all the other feudal remnants were mistreated. During the wars, numerous parts of the Hue Complex were completely destroyed. Those parts that survived the wars were later used for other purposes such as a warehouse of printing factories, dormitory of military forces, or as a cemetery for fallen soldiers (Tran and Phan, 2002).

The turning point for the Hue Complex was in 1981 when the UNESCO Director Mr. M’Bow visited Hue and promptly sent out the emergency call for retrieving the feudal values in the city. In the following year, the Hue Company for Cultural Heritage Management was founded which later on changed its name to the Hue Monument Conservation Center (hereby known as HMCC). The Center was missioned to directly manage, conserve and utilize the cultural heritage values of the Complex. In 1983, under the administration of HMCC, a Hue UNESCO Working Group was established comprising both international and national experts. For the first time, scientific historic research and investigations on values of the Hue Complex were conducted. Between 1981 and 1990, international funds were pouring into the reconstruction of the Nguyen Dynasty’s architecture. In 1986, Vietnam opened itself to the international markets, marking the beginning of the “Renovation era” (*Đổi Mới*). In 1987, Vietnam ratified the World Heritage Convention. The Hue Complex grew to be the first and an important cultural bridge between Vietnam and the world. The Hue UNESCO Working Group played a vital role not only in reconstruction works, but also more importantly in lobbying at both national and international levels for the recognition of cultural values in Hue. In 1992, with the technical and scientific support of the working group, Vietnam was able to submit its nomination profiles for the Hue Complex to the UNESCO in Paris. It included 52 working papers, 62 big size maps, 100 aerial photographs, 64 slide films, drawing records, and a 45 minute video tape (Le et al., 2004). In 1993, UNESCO finally listed the Hue Complex as a cultural WHS.

Five years after the WHS recognition, Hue received in total more than 1 million USD internationally and 30 billion VND from the national government to reconstruct 50 totally destroyed components, and to restore 60 other components which were partly destroyed. Biggest international sponsors in this period included the UNESCO, the French and Poland governments. Only in 1999, 15 components were rebuilt with a fund of 20 billion VND. As a result, in the 9th Conference of the Hue-UNESCO Working Group in 1999, UNESCO representatives confirmed the end of the ‘crisis period’ of the Hue Complex, and announced its next period – the period of ‘sustainable development’.

The first 15 years of the heritagization process of the Hue Complex witnessed a strong emphasis on aesthetic characteristics. “Aesthetic” has become the catch word taken primarily from the appeal of Mr. M’Bow to be used as the justification for the canonization of heritage values in Hue. The work related to the Hue Complex after its WHS designation focused mainly on material and monumental aspects. As it can be seen in many reports, conferences, speeches and interviews, the numbers of restored buildings,

monuments and items were repeatedly reported to show the success of the WHS conservation. This follows exactly the heritage discourse of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. This authorized heritage discourse, termed by Smith in her book “Uses of heritage” (2006), “is a professional discourse that privileges expert values and knowledge about the past and its material manifestations, and dominates and regulates professional heritage practices” (p.4). In the evaluation of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), Vietnam justified the “outstanding value of the Hue Complex” that: “The Hue Complex represents unique architectural, sculptural, and aesthetic achievements and highly creative labor by the Vietnamese people over a long period of time” (Boccardi and Logan, 2006, p.5).

However, from 1996 onwards, activities of HMCC navigated towards the protection and recognition of intangible cultural heritage. It reflects the Master Plan for Conservation and Development of Heritage Values in Hue from 1996-2010, which was later extended to 2020 (Le et al., 2004). The plan puts emphasis on the intangible aspects of Nguyen Dynasty culture, including Han-Nom poem carving on monuments, royal poem decorating in palaces and tombs, royal music, royal dances and royal festivals. A series of 15 conferences on intangible heritage values were held by the HMCC. This new and strong attention to the intangible cultural heritage of the Hue Complex is backed by the UNESCO that also shifted their focus from tangible to intangible heritage. In 2003, the 1972 World Heritage Convention was extended into a new path named: “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”. As all the intangible cultural values can now be listed as a heritage, Hue Royal Court Music also got its name onto the intangible World Cultural Heritage list in 2003, paving the way for a series of other intangible cultural nominations from Vietnam the following years.

The shift to a more intangible perspective of heritage answers the increasing criticism of the Eurocentric nature of the World Heritage Convention, the materialization of the understanding of heritage and commercialization of the WHS status (Albert and Ringbeck, 2015). This shift is argued to be an inevitable product of the popularization of WHSs in the context of globalization. It reflects the UNESCO’s attempt to ensure the global inclusive listing and the universal relevance and application to different contexts of all state parties around the world (Harrison, 2013).

The Vietnam State Party has vigorously utilized the intangibility of the Nguyen Dynasty’s feudal values and synchronized it with the heritage discourse within UNESCO. This has shown the dynamism in the heritagization process. Moreover, it raises the question on the motivation behind the enthusiasm of the Vietnam state in applying these perspectives of heritage in the national context. The next section will elaborate on that.

4.3 The cultural heritage in the national narratives

From the historical background of both feudalism and colonialism, Hue is a problematic location in Vietnam. In the early years of the Socialist Republic after 1975, the Vietnamese government was committed to socialism in which national narratives were built on the fight against feudalism and colonialism. Following these narratives, the Hue Heritage of the Nguyen Dynasty did not fit into the socialist agenda (Long, 2003; Tran and Phan, 2002).

However, after 1981, the Vietnamese state authorities started to recognize the international interests in the Hue Complex that eventually brought in funding, tourists and investments. In the 1990s the attitudes of the Vietnamese government towards the feudal traces changed and became a more “neutral, and even favorable assessment that would have been unthinkable even a decade earlier” (Lockhart, 2001, p.10). The WHS designation in 1993 finally transformed the national grand narratives on history and heritage dramatically (Saltiel, 2014).

In the first phase of the heritagization, the Vietnamese government laid a strong emphasis in the “outstanding architecture” of the Imperial Complex of buildings, tombs and pagodas. Rather than terming as a historical places, the national heritage registered Hue as an architectural and artistic place. The WHS nomination documents also neglected the political and historical sensitivities, and rather focused on the aesthetical architectural uniqueness of the Hue Complex, as it is stated in the official reports of the 17th workshop of World Heritage Committee in Colombia, December 1993:

“The Monument is the great assembly of the typical historic architectures of the one historical stage in Vietnam from the early 19th century to the middle of 20th century, they were composed by including the Citadel, imperial palaces, imperial tombs, temples, shrine, pagodas, esplanade, imperial arena, etc. They are located aesthetically in a natural landscapes with the full factor of the oriental geomancy idea which has remained continuously in this area”.

For this designated “outstanding value”, the Hue Complex is introduced as the “*masterpiece of urban architectural poetry*” on the official website of HMCC. Moreover, along with the special focus on the aesthetic characteristics, being a WHS also implies that the Hue Complex has become the property of the humanity at large. Its feudal root and possession hence were blurred out. This switch has distracted the discourse of the heritage away from a previous political narrative towards the emphasis of global protection, international peace and common welfare. Therefore, the designation of the Hue Complex as a WHS had to be depoliticized in order to be accepted by state authorities (Saltiel, 2014). Through this door, the Nguyen Dynasty feudal period made a come-back into Vietnamese history.

Following the de-politicization of the Hue Complex, after the 2000s, the heritage debate focused more on the royal intangible aspects. In 2003, the provincial People’s Committee and the HMCC successfully nominated the Royal Court Music as the “*Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*”, simultaneously inscribed to the World Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Previously, Nguyen art and culture used to suffer the same prejudices from the socialist regime. It was criticized as a copy version of Chinese and later French themes without own Vietnamese creativities and identities. Historians titled these elements of feudal arts and culture as ‘half-breed’ or even ‘bastardization’ (Lockhart, 2001). However, the heritage of the Nguyen Dynasty is contemporarily earning its significance in the national development. In 2010, Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan signed the Master Plan for Conservation and Development of Heritage Values in Hue for 2010-2020, and boldly stated that “*the Complex of Monuments and the Royal Court Music are the invaluable properties of the nation. Protecting the integrity of the Hue cultural values*

means to protect the national identity as well as enrich the culture of the humanity"². The heritage values of the Nguyen Dynasty are now more and more included into education and into national identity.

Consolidation of the national identity is one of the crucial strategies of Vietnam to develop a market-based economy under the direction of socialism. In the 1990s, the leading Communist Party had identified six national long-term strategies. One of those is to build and develop a uniquely modern society that possesses "a progressive culture imbued with national identity" (*đậm đà bản sắc dân tộc*) which was later officially regulated and fully elaborated into the national Resolution No. V in 1998. Cultural heritages are the first components of the national identity which are considered to consolidate the spirit lives of Vietnamese people on one hand, and to be the objective and motivation of the macro socio-economic development on the other (Long, 2003). Intangible cultural heritage, therefore, serves as the cultural validation and development resource of the Party-State. Mrs. Nguyen Kim Dung from the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture and Information reported to UNESCO that "the Government of Viet Nam views the identification, protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage as vital in the present period of rapid socio-economic transformation." (Cited in Salemin, 2013, p.165).

Gaining the UNESCO recognition and the legitimating from the national narratives, intangible cultural heritage in Hue has gradually received impetus attentions. Utilizing this momentum, from 2009 to 2016, the heritage of the Nguyen Dynasty achieved three more inscriptions into the World Heritage list, including: the Woodblocks of Nguyen Dynasty, the Imperial Archives, and the Royal Literature on Royal Architecture. Ngo Duc Thinh, one of the leading scholars of Vietnam culture and a member of the National Heritage Commission, commented that the culture of Hue is characterized as the urban culture of the last Feudal Dynasty in Vietnam. Therefore, the culture of Hue is unique in that it entails the Royal/Imperial and noble elements (Ngo, 2018). Thanks to this cultural uniqueness, the direction for cultural and socio development of Thua thien-Hue is to "protect and enhance the recognized heritage to develop Hue into a cultural tourism center that is imbued in the national identities and rich in its own Hue culture"³. After the reform era, it appears that this once-denied heritage of the Nguyen Dynasty will gain even more prominence in the future (Saltiel, 2014).

Turning from the "half-breed" criticism, the arts and culture of the Nguyen Dynasty gradually confirm their roles in the contemporary discourse of heritage within the grand narratives of identities and nation-building. It appears more and more in research that this imperial art and culture are preciously unique and creatively adopted the Chinese influences to build up own characteristics into the national Vietnamese ideology and identities (Lockhart, 2001; Long, 2003). In 2014, a retrospective statement of the "outstanding universal value" of the Hue Complex monuments was approved at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee : "Hue is not only an example of the traditional architectures but also the spiritual highlight and cultural centre in which the Buddhism and Confucius mingle with the local cultural tradition embedding the distinctive ideology of religion, philosophy and ethics" (Hue Monument

² This statement is cited in the Decree No.818/QĐ-TTĐ, extended from the previous Decree No.105/QĐ-TTĐ signed in 1996 concerning "Master plan for the conservation and enhancement of the Complex of the Hue Monuments' values period 1996-2010".

³ According to Decree No.86/2009/QĐ-TTĐ on the "Master plan of social and economic development of Thua Thien-Hue province to 2020" signed by the Prime Minister on 17th June 2009.

Conservation Centre, 2015, p.29). This highlights the essences of Vietnamese most distinctive cultural characteristics.

4.4 The cultural heritage on stage – Imagineering of the cultural heritage

The previous section has showed how the Nguyen Dynasty culture turned the table to be now crucial for national tradition, history and identity. Phan Thanh Hai, Director of HMCC, emphasizes in the 35th anniversary of the HMCC that: “Utilizing and developing the values of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Hue is the best solution that can simultaneously preserve the heritage, vitalize their values, integrate them into the present socio-cultural and economic lives; so that to educate people, to contribute to the economic development, and in return to provide resources for further heritage conservation” (Hue Monument Conservation Centre, 2018). This section will investigate the process that shapes cultural heritage to be the core resource for the socio-economic development through tourism.

Heritagization is the process of giving the old a new function, of making sense of the past in the present. In the case of Vietnam, the relics of the Nguyen Dynasty have now been revitalized and given a new function as a source for socio-economic development through tourism. Since the 1980s the Vietnamese government has thrived to open the country. “Integration and development” has been the slogan ever since. The forms of integration into global networks that are relevant here are heritage conservation and tourism. Heritage conventions have been playing the role of bridging Vietnam with the other countries well in the form of foreign tourists and foreign investments (Long, 2003). The designation of the Hue Complex as a WHS in 1993 has helped to put the name of Vietnam into the global map not as a warzone but as a prestige and culturally unique place that is worth visiting. Commenting on the impacts of the designation in Hue, Vu and Ton-That state:

“The impact of listing was two-fold. On the one hand, it stimulated interest in the city’s cultural heritage and brought an increase in tourist arrivals. On the other hand, international resources and expertise, made available for the protection and renewal of their cultural assets, have facilitated a transformation in the way the city’s cultural heritage is presented for tourists, which in turn, re-positioned Hue’s heritage in light of its aesthetics and cultural achievements” (Vu and Ton-That, 2012, p.238).

The WHS status has been a crucial hitch to the reassessment of Hue’s past, present and future. World Heritage listing has removed the contentiousness off the feudal past and re-defined it as important for the pride and for the socio-economic development of the nation (Long, 2003). Witnessing the influx of global tourists and investments, the Vietnamese government soon realized that a WHS can generate enormous economic benefits. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, there are inextricable links between heritage conservation and tourism. Tourism is the only source of inspiration that can motivate people to visit historical and cultural relic sites. Only tourism can mobilize and create enough resources to finance preservation, renovation and day-to-day operational costs of larger heritage sites. In return, only good preservation combined with marketing and investments in infrastructure will attract more visitors (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2017). The Citadel, one of the 14

components of the Hue Complex, has alone attracted millions of tourists annually. Heritage has become a national asset (Bendix, 2009; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006).

Since the early 2000s, the provincial government has suggested a Master Plan to develop Hue as a festival city based on its rich cultural assets. In 2000, the first 12-day Hue Festival was held in Hue with large-scale, well-staged and interesting performances. The festival was reported to harvest remarkable successes in promoting the competitive advantages of Hue in the field of cultural tourism. Quoting the words of the Hue local authorities, the Hue Festival is considered to enhance the position of the province as the key culture-tourism center of Vietnam. Ever since, the festival is turned into a biennial event in Hue. Furthermore, in 2007, the Vietnamese Prime Minister signed a decision that envisages to develop Hue into an international festival city in the ASEAN region by 2030⁴.

During the Hue Festival, cultural activities take place at different locations of the Hue Complex as well as on the streets. After 10 successive Hue Festivals, more and more royal rituals and traditions have been revitalized and performed over the years, such as performance of Royal Court Music (first performed in 2004), re-enact the Royal Night (2006), Nam Giao Offering Ritual (2006), Xa Tac Offering Ritual (2010) (Figure 4). Additionally, royal performances and exhibitions, open for visitors with valid entrance fee, were organized so that visitors can experience the royal daily life and royal rites. For instance, with 1.9 million VND (65 Euro) for one ticket to a “Royal Night” programme, visitors can live a night in the Forbidden City and enjoy the royal ambience. Visitors will be served with royal cuisine while royal music and performances are enacted in the background. There is also a place for tourists to try on costumes of Kings, Queens, or mandarins and sit on duplicated thrones.

⁴ According to Decree No. 143/2007/QĐ-TTg dated August 30, 2007 signed by the Prime Minister.

Figure 4. The Royal tastes (3 pictures)



(Photo 1 – Ambience of a Royal Night in the Forbidden City inside the Citadel, Hue Festival Center, 2018)



(Photo 2 – Royal artists in traditional performance costumes, Hue Festival Center, 2018)



(Photo 3 – royal cuisine, Hue Festival Center and khamphahue.com)

Royal cuisine is another famous aspect of Nguyen Dynasty culture that is believed to bring out the authenticity and the tastes of the past. The royal cuisine is mostly served in shapes of phoenix and dragons which symbolize the power and nobility of the royal family. It is also referred back to the fairy tales about the origin of the Viet People that are the children of the dragon and the fairy lady. The dishes are prepared by the gastronomic artists to assure the original taste. In an international symposium organized by HMCC on 20th March 2018, the Vietnam National Commission of Heritage firmly recommended the Nguyen Dynasty royal cuisine for the World Heritage status.

All royal aspects have been staged for tourists. They are developed into specific tourism products in consideration to the comparative advantages of Hue. This is the largest industry and the largest source of income for the province at the present and the future to come. Dang Van Bai reaffirmed in a symposium in 2018 that: “the Complex of Hue has earned its new position and function in society in general, and in the heart of the Hue people in particular. While the new function as cultural builder and as leading resource for tourism have been clearly confirmed, what is the position and function of them in the heart of the Hue people is still ambiguous that need further research”⁵.

The next section will move the focus to the perspectives of people living in and around the Hue Complex and the Nguyen descendants. How do they perceive the WHS status and what does it mean for them?

⁵ Statement of Pro. Dang Van Bai in the International symposium on “Sustainable management and appropriate utilization of the cultural landscape and historical-eco system at royal tombs of Nguyen Dynasty and Huong River’s upstream basin”, Hue, March 2018.

5 The other cultural heritage reality

The previous parts have depicted the process of heritagization in Hue which reproduces a contentious past into a source for national identity building and development. It is worth to remind that the Hue Complex contains series of components that stretch along 30km of the Perfume River running across Hue city towards the surrounding districts and communes. Due to this spatial dispersal, this paper focuses specifically three groups of local communities at three locations: the Citadel in the center of Hue city, Tu Duc tomb 6 km in the Southwest from the city center, and Gia Long tomb 24 km to the South from the center. The first two sites are located in the administrative of Hue city, and the third located in Huong Tho communes, Huong Tra district.

The Hue Complex was first designated with 14 different components (see annex 1). Obviously not all components share the same fame and attention. Of all informants, none was able to list all 14 components of the Complex. Most of the interviewees refer the WHS just as the Citadel. Most of them use “Citadel”, or “Hue” in general to refer the whole WHS.

5.1 Under the shadow of the heritage

As a historical result, the people living around all the components of the Hue Complex are large in number and heterogeneous in characteristics. They bear the direct impacts from the heritage designation and its regulations. Besides, they are the ones who affect the conservation conditions of the heritage monuments. Previously, the heritage buildings were used for contemporary purposes such as housing, factories, storehouse and training schools. However, after the WHS designation, public access to the components was limited. Different entrance fees have been applied for domestic and international visitors. Nevertheless, there is also a free-entrance policy for local people on certain national holidays.

The areas around the components are densely populated. Most noticeable is the case of the Citadel in the center of Hue city. People have always been living in the first layer of the Citadel (Royal city), on and next to the Citadel Wall. In 2019, an estimated 4,200 households were living on top of the outer Wall of the Citadel reaching a population of 15,000 people (People’s Committee of Thua Thien-Hue province, 2019). Most of them came to the Wall after 1975, picked up a piece of land and built their houses. According to many national mission reports to UNESCO, these people and their daily life activities are identified as the leading factor of damages and pressures on the heritage components. In 2011, the provincial government made a decision to reallocate people from the Wall of the Citadel to the suburbs of Hue city.⁶ Funding of 1,282 billion VND was provided. However, after seven years of implementation, the project moved only 166 households.

“There has been information about rehabilitation project not only in 2011 but even for more than 15 years now. I have been waiting and doing assessments on our properties for compensation.

⁶ The provincial government signed the Decision No. 1918/QĐ-UBND on 11th September 2011 to implement the project of conservation, restoration and embellishment of Imperial City system in Hue. A component was to reallocate people who live on the Citadel Wall.

However, nothing happened in the last 15 years. And my child is going to have his own son now, but we still stay here hanging on the Wall of the World Heritage sites.” (Male, 57 years old, 30 years living on the Wall, Xuan 68 Street, Hue city)

Figure 5. Households living on the outer Wall (Thượng Thành) of the Citadel



Over time, the number of people living on the Wall is growing which generates enormous pressures on the conditions of the heritage components (Figure 5). While the HMCC continues to emphasize the need to reallocate the people in order to conserve the WHS, little progress has been made.

“We want to move of course, you see, three generations in the same small house. Our house is so old and shaggy... But we will not move. I have lived here since the 1980s, at that time we just chose a land and built a house, we do not own any “red book”⁷. So, based on their assessments and rules, we are not entitled for land compensation, they only give us some amount of money. How are we secured without land? And what are we supposed to earn for a living there? At least, we need an appropriate land so that we can build a house for us and for our children and grandchildren.” (Male, 65 years old, 30 years living on the Wall in Xuan 68 street, Hue city)

It is clear to us that against the willingness to move away from the Wall, people are hesitated due to insufficient compensation and reallocation policies. They ask for appropriate compensation in the form of land and money in case they have to move outside their residence for the purpose of rehabilitation. However, according to the Provincial People’s Committee, only those who lived on the Wall before 1975 with legalized land-use documents – usually known as red book – would be compensated with land. The others, which accounts for about half of the households, would receive a partial financial support based on official valuation of their properties. The population living on the Wall comprises of different groups, most of them are the common labor, the poor, and the low-educated. Most do not have a legal document, a “red book”, to claim for the possession of their land. This leads to many disadvantages for them based on the terms of compensation for resettlement.

⁷ The “red book” is an official document that legalises the rights of possession and use of land and properties on that land in Vietnam

Therefore, although people are suffering from poor living standards on the Wall, the majority would like to remain there. Over time, the project of resettlement has been jammed and named as the “hanging project” (*dự án treo*) for years.

Two pictures were taken on the same street, Tran Huy Lieu Street, right outside the Citadel Wall (Figure 6). The left one shows the better half where households had been reallocated providing a clear lane with the view to the Wall and the front canal. Tourists sometimes take this lane to enjoy the Citadel on cycles. The right picture shows the other half of the street, where many households living poorly and crowdedly, we cannot see the Wall and the water line on this side.

Figure 6. Two faces of a street



(Photo: Quyen Mai, 2017)

Asking one citizen of this street about the impacts of the WHS designation, she answered:

“To be honest, after the designation, there have been improvements, especially for the environment. Before the water in the canal was much polluted, in sunny days a horrible smell came off from the water and we could not bear it. Also before, there were many poor families living here, they were not well educated which impacted the social lives, however they have been rehabilitated to other places. But just a small part of them have been moved. If you cross this street to the next part, families still live next to the Wall, and the situation is still more or less the same as before.” (FDG1)

However, environmental improvements mostly of the air and water quality seem to be the only salient impact to the people living under the shadow of the heritage. In all three research places, local people stated to receive little economic benefits from the WHS designation. The ones who directly benefit from the WHS are vendors, small restaurants, and hotels. Even the businesses are not benefiting to the extent they expected as most tourists come to Hue in organized tours in big groups, they just visit the components and then leave.

“They just come down from the buses, then go into the Forbidden City, they will not stop at our restaurants. They mostly stay in hotels in the other side of the city here it is more modern and busier with more fancy shops and restaurants. If they want to enjoy the authenticity of Hue they come to

the recommended famous restaurants. Tourists often go by here but rarely stop. I mostly serve the local workers who come for a cheap coffee, or for beers and food after a working day” (FGD1).

The situation looks similar in other parts of the Hue WHS located in Huong Tra district. This area is more rural and the people depends more on agriculture and forestry for their livelihoods. Timber is the main source of income. Although there are two World Heritage tombs in this district, people living in their proximity do not receive much benefits from tourism at these two tombs.

“Everything happens behind the Walls. We did not earn any benefits from that. All are managed by the HMCC, all the revenues go back to the HMCC and the province. They always said that the Complex is the invaluable property of our nation and of humanity, so we – the ones who live under the shadow of heritage sites – need to protect the site, but what do we have back instead? Not much but so much troubles and obstacles.” (Male, 40, communal governmental officer, Huong Tho Commune, Huong Tra district).

“Obstacles” is the term that appeared many times in the informants’ replies on how they perceive the designated heritage. The World Heritage status comes with different sets of laws and regulations. While the assumption about trickledown effects of benefits from investment and tourists to local people is vague, those laws and regulations affect the people do directly. According to the heritage laws, it is prohibited to build houses in Zone I; and the construction of new houses, or to repair or reconstruction of old ones in Zone II is strictly controlled. People need to apply for permission from the provincial People’s Committee. A woman living on the Wall of the Citadel, which is part of Zone I, complains:

“You see, they said there will be tourists coming. But they come to somewhere else not our house. We do not have a good space for tourists. I want to have restaurant but my house is small. I want to build up several floors for more space, or may be to make a motel. But we are not allowed to, it is the law.” (Female, 28 years old, Citadel, Hue city)

Again, Huong Tra district shares a similar situation. People living around the WHSs face the same issue with heritage laws and regulations. However, here impacts seem to be even stronger as people are rather poorer.

“I have been staying here for nearly 60 years of my life. This land is all I have. Now my son has been married and I want to build another house on this land for him as an inheriting gift. And then they said this is the land of heritage in zone II, so I have to apply for provincial permission. How can I do that? I am just a poor farmer, and the provincial government is so far away.” (Male, 64, farmer, Huong Tho Commune, Huong Tra district).

The farmer shared with us that he had consulted the communal government several times, however, he has not received proper feedback yet. On the same day, the communal governmental officer in charge with these complains was asked to explain. Although he thoroughly understood the reasonable demands of the people, he said that this issue goes beyond his responsibilities in his response as follows:

“Do you see the irrationality in here? According to the national land use law, people with authorized land use certificate have rights to reconstruct houses, or build new ones on the land upon their wish.

However, the heritage laws and regulations restrict this recognized right. People in Zone I and II cannot use their land in the same way as other people do.” (Male, 40 years old, communal governmental officer, Huong Tho Commune, Huong Tra district).

Not only the land use rights in Zone I and II are strictly controlled, other economic activities are also prohibited in order to preserve the larger landscape of the WHS. Around Gia Long tomb, many farming households are not allowed to use their land for tree plantations since plantations “will degrade the overall landscape of the heritage”.

“I understand it is the heritage land. But tell me, if the farmers cannot grow trees here then there would be solutions for them. One, the government can replace them with another land that can be cultivated. Or two, the government should introduce the farmers with other methods of cultivations or other kinds of plants. The short-term industrial trees are their pot of rice, it is not that easy to tell them to stop planting it for any reason.” (Male, 40 years old, communal governmental officer, Huong Tho Commune, Huong Tra district).

Small businesses are also being affected. Street sales near WHSs are increasingly been prohibited, most noticeably at the Citadel. The street in front of the Citadel has been closed allowing walking visitors only. A female street vendor said:

“For the first few years, it was great for us. Visitors were coming to my place for a fresh coconut juice. But now, they block the road, make it one way street and prohibit vendors. Tourists stopped coming as it is not convenient anymore. I am only surviving here. I have the whole family to feed.” (Female, 52 years old, small business, Hue city).

All in all, against the shining image of the WHS as a precious property and a resource for social, cultural and economic benefits, the people who live in or right next to the heritage seem to receive little promised benefits, but rather experience obstacles.

5.2 The truthful heirs – the Nguyen descendants

It has always been an unsettling question in the field of the heritage studies on whose heritage it is. In the case of the Hue Complex, it might be reasonable to argue that the descendants of the Nguyen Dynasty are the truthful heir of all the recognized components. After hundreds of years of building and reigning, the Nguyen Kinship had greatly expanded. Although most of the Nguyen descendants had fled out of Vietnam after the Indochina wars, many remained in Hue and passed on their family’s name and traditions. In this study, we focused on Nguyen descendants and tried to answer the question how they perceived the designation of their ancestors’ heritage as a WHS.

As a tradition in Vietnamese culture, children and grandchildren carry their family names, worship their ancestors, and take care of the ancestors’ houses. Failing to follow these traditions is considered as a great insult of the whole kinship. In the Imperial period, royal families carried distinctive family names which showed the positions and the relations between each of the individuals within the kinship and among royal families’ generations. The Royal family had strict rules to name their children applying differently for boys and girls. These family names express the nobility of the carriers which differentiate

them from each other and from ‘common people’⁸. However, after the Communist Party took power, former members of the royal families were mistreated and bullied. Realizing their roots just by their names, it was more difficult for them to integrate into the communist society. Therefore, many royal families had changed their royal family names, and took ‘Nguyen’ generally as their family name instead. With the opening in the end of 1990s, the attitudes against royal family became friendlier. However, descendants of royal families continue to use ‘Nguyen’ as a family name.

As attitudes have been changing, the descendants of the Nguyen Dynasty are now allowed to practice their worship inside the Forbidden City of the Hue Citadel. The Nguyen descendants in Hue are represented by a group of 10 respected people into the Nguyen Phuoc Kinship Union (Hội đồng họ tộc nhà Nguyễn Phước). Every five years, all descendants in the royal kinship voluntarily nominate and vote for their representatives. The Nguyen representatives organize activities concerning worshipping, connecting Nguyen descendants domestically and internationally, providing support to the Nguyen in needs, and managing the Union fund. They represent the Nguyen family in all official affairs with the local government agencies. For example, if one descendant of the Nguyen Dynasty wants to visit the heritage sites, he/she needs to apply to the Union. The Union will then make a list and submit to the HMCC for entrance permission. If they do not follow this procedure, they have to purchase tickets as normal tourists.

It became salient in our FGD with members of the Union that they have little knowledge and information concerning the conservation and management of the WHS. None of the members in the Union could confirm the authenticity of the artifacts and objects that are used and displayed in several shrines in the Forbidden City. One of them believed that those precious objects such as bronze incense burner and vases had been replaced with replicas. The Union is not included in activities concerning WHS conservation and other decision-making processes of their ancestors’ places. One member of the Union of Nguyen descendants complained:

“It is their money, their funding, and their working groups. They have their research groups when they reconstructed some components of the Complex, but we were not in. We were not able to protect or reconstruct the components, so we are in no position to criticize. They do what they think is necessary.” (FGD with Union of Nguyen descendants)

According to the HMCC, the Nguyen descendants are highly respected and supported by the authorities. They are allowed to conduct worshipping and ritual activities as a tradition within the Forbidden City of the Citadel every year. In these events, the Union needs to submit their plan and a list of participants to the HMCC in advance. Organizers and participants have to follow the WHS regulations even though they might go against the traditions. For example, burning incense is one of the important rites in Vietnamese culture that is believed to help transferring and thus communicating the praying to the death. However, open fire is forbidden in the WHS and the Union often finds itself in the difficult situation of persuading its relatives not to burn incense during their prayers.

⁸ Some example of the royal family name for princes under Nguyen Dynasty were Miên, Hồng, Ưng, Bửu, Vĩnh, Bảo... And those for princesses were Công Nữ, Công tôn Nữ, Công Tăng Tôn Nữ...

In general, it is extremely important for the Nguyen royal descendants to connect with their ancestors, and to connect between different members within the kinship. The designated components of the WHS, on the contrary, is lesser of their concerns. Little connections have been found between the Nguyen descendants and the World Heritage inscriptions, as for them, they accept that those inscriptions are not under their possession, as found out during the Focus Group Discussion: “They are now the national properties. We cannot ask for anything. They are not ours any longer.” (FGD2, The descendants of Nguyen Dynasty).

5.3 The other heritage

“Asking how Hue people think about the heritage? I would say they are turning their back towards the heritage. Even those who are 60 or even 70 years old know nothing about heritage, and there are younger people who do not care about heritage.” (Male, 62 years old, Officer of Provincial department of tourism, Hue city).

That was the statement of a governmental officer who has been working at the Department of Tourism for over 30 years. According to him, heritage values of Hue as a tourism product have come to its saturation and heritage values for national pride and identity building have lost their meaning for ordinary people.

“This disconnect should be realized in its historical roots. In the feudal time, local people could not enter the Citadel; every time the royal families appeared in public, the local people had to bow and were not allowed to look up into their face. Since the beginning, there has always been a straight divided line. In the modern times, royal properties have turned into visiting places, and royal culture has been commodified in performances. It is not for everyone to experience. The World Heritage inscriptions therefore are becoming more distant with the Hue people.” (Male, 35, Officer of Provincial department of tourism, Hue city)

Most of the interviewees agreed that the WHS does not have a direct impact on their lives. Some of them perceived the WHS merely as a tourism attraction of Hue.

“I only go to the heritage sites when I need to show my guests or my friends from other cities around. I only visit several main places. The tombs are somehow the same. For other royal performances, it is expensive to buy tickets. And I think it is boring to listen to the old style music and watch the old style dances which I do not understand.” (Female, 46 years old, Hue city).

The World Heritage status in Hue has grown to be mediocre to normal people. The glamorous effect of being listed has been fading away over time. Explaining for this indifferent attitude of local people, the head of the Travel Management Section in the Department of Tourism, Thua Thien-Hue province, said:

“The majority of the Hue people do not know what heritage is, and people in the other parts are not concerned because they do not see the direct impacts of the heritage on their lives. The other reason is that the government did not do well to integrate and educate the heritage values widely to the local people. Of all 1.4 million people in Hue, how many of them have visited, just say, the Citadel? How many are really interested? There is an open-day policy for local people which is good but not enough. Visiting and remembering and then understanding are three different things.” (Male, 35 years old, officer, Hue city)

However, informants express the pride to be “Hue people”, and in their perception Hue is distinct from the other Vietnamese cities. The Hue culture and identity are influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism which were strictly practiced in the Nguyen Dynasty. These two factors intertwined, and over a long history, have built up a unique Hue culture which is reflected among the Hue people through their lifestyles, cuisine, or music. A 33 year old male who lives at the Wall of the Citadel said:

“It is beautiful to have the World Heritage status. Hue deserves that recognition. But that is not crucial. The heritage of Hue is much more than just those inscriptions. It is the food that I am eating, it is the traditional values embraced in the lifestyles, and it is unique set of qualities in the people.”

(Male, 33, Citadel, Hue city)

In his book “Hue people, who are you?”, the author Buu Y wrote that each Hue person is born on a “spiritual heritage” which comprises numerous values that are taught in every activities of social lives and which are passed on from generation to generation. The spiritual heritage of Hue entails the strong family bonds and awareness, the moral bases, and appreciation of traditions. Possessing this spiritual heritage, the Hue people are always proud, or even arrogant to set themselves as being ‘exceptional’ compared to the people from other parts of Vietnam (Buu, 2004).

6 Conclusion

Taking the case of cultural heritage value of the Hue Complex, Vietnam, we attempted to understand the heritagization process. Heritagization canonized a contentious past and assigned meaning and function to it in order to fit it into the wider context of development in a contemporary society. Furthermore, we advanced the exploration on how this is perceived by the people who are directly living in and around the WHS. The case of Hue has showed three elements of heritagization: the aesthetic judgment, the global technical expertise and the grand narrative of the Vietnamese nation.

Long captured in the term of “feudal rebel” by the Communist party of Vietnam established in the two Indochina wars, the Complex of Monuments in Hue has made a comeback to be one of the most important heritages in Vietnam. Being deep in political contentions, both tangible and intangible feudal components had historically endured hostile assessments and attitudes. However, since 1981, catching up with the aesthetic appreciation endorsed by the former director of the UNESCO, the Complex has been able to cast its negativities away. In the time of the societal opening, the Vietnamese national state has exhaustively utilized the aesthetic judgement in order to neutralize the previous political contestations, and to align with the UNESCO World Heritage standards. It has helped to depoliticize the heritage for a wider acceptance in the country on one hand, and to connect with global experts and investments on the other.

Thanks to a global support on technical expertise and investment, after two decades of reconstruction and conservation works, the Hue Complex has become an important tourist hotspot in Vietnam. The intangible cultural aspects of the complex have attracted a renewed attention and increasingly become important for the national grand narratives in several ways. Firstly, the heritage reflects identities of a typical Vietnamese culture. Different rituals and performances from the Nguyen Dynasty were revitalized that served the purpose of connecting modern society with tradition, the souls and the typical

characteristics of Vietnam as a nation. Therefore, secondly, it appears that the traditional cultural heritage has now become the strategic tool of the national state to shape the cultural and development policy. And thirdly, cultural heritage is considered as a comparative advantage that will be the leading resource for the economic development of the province. Over 35 years, the heritagization process has transformed a formerly neglected past to a decisive factor of the national identity and future.

Regardless of the positive impacts of the World Heritage inscription in Hue which were claimed and promoted by provincial and national state authorities, people living in and around the WHS show different perspectives towards the WHS. Those who live right under the shadows of the heritage do not earn direct benefits from the WHS but in contrary encounter obstacles and troubles. Nguyen descendants claim loss of control over their ancestral inheritance. And the Hue people in general show limited knowledge and interests in the designated values. Although they agree that they are proud, even sometimes arrogant, with their cultural richness, they consider the recognition by the UNESCO only as a minor part of their identity. Moreover, as the cultural heritage of Hue is also being commodified in a festival and in performances, in some way local people feel excluded, and might lose their interest on exploring their own “outstanding values”.

In conclusion, while the Hue Complex is said to have made wide recognition and appreciation on the global scale attracting an average of eleven thousand international tourists per day, it seems that people living in and around it rather feel the negative consequences than the positive ones. And while the heritage is said to successfully connect Hue and Vietnam to the universal standards, it seems that it is losing its connections with its own people.

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Annex 1: List of components in Hue Complex of Monuments

No.	World Heritage ID	Name	Property (ha)	Buffer Zone (ha)
1	678-001	Citadel of Hué, including Imperial City, Purple Forbidden City, Royal Canal, Museum of Hue, National University, Lake of the Serene Heart	159.71	71.93
2	678-002	Thien Mu Pagoda	4.24	
3	678-003	Temple of Letters and Temple of Military	9.73	
4	678-004	Royal Arena and Voi Re Temple	2.45	
5	678-005	Duc Duc Tomb	8.55	
6	678-006	Nam Giao Esplanade	12.41	
7	678-007	Tu Duc Tomb	12.99	
8	678-008	Dong Khanh Tomb	2.29	
9	678-009	Hon Chen Temple	0.87	
10	678-010	Thieu Tri Tomb	27.9	
11	678-011	Khai Dinh Tomb	18.19	
12	678-012	Minh Mang Tomb	34.15	
13	678-013	Gia Long Tomb	20.72	
14	678-014	Tran Hai Fortress	1.27	

Annex 2: The distribution of 14 components of the Hue Complex



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Authors: Quyen Mai Le and Girma Kelboro
Contacts: quyen.mai@uni-bonn.de; gmsuro@uni-bonn.de
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